

The concerns and appreciation of the country for their service was real, but the medical science to link causation to service in the Gulf War was severely lacking.

In 1994, I recall Joe Kennedy and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and myself introducing something very radical. It was called compensation for an undiagnosed illness. As we were downsizing the military, we wanted to make sure that these Gulf War veterans received their medical attention, yet they were also in economic dire straits. So we also wanted to make sure their families were taken care of as we then focused and put millions of dollars into medical research to press the bounds of science.

The VA then struggled with our initiatives. What they then learned was, simply put, that the VA over the last several years has narrowly interpreted congressional intent to provide for sick veterans with disability compensation that they so dearly earned and should receive.

The VA failed to consider illnesses like fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and chronic multisymptom illnesses and other illnesses that cannot be clearly defined as having been attributed to service in the Persian Gulf. I am especially pleased that this bill will include a list of symptoms that the VA must recognize as being a manifestation of an undiagnosed illness.

This bill will help clarify Congress's intent with regards to the benefits of sick Persian Gulf War veterans. I fully support this bill and look forward to referring the measure to the Senate.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chair and the ranking member for bringing us H.R. 2540, the Veterans Benefit Act. I would like to briefly call attention to another provision which will provide fairness for our Nation's veterans.

The VA currently holds about 4,000 national life insurance and U.S. Government life insurance policies valued at about \$23 million on which payment has not been made. Why is this? Because the VA has been unable to locate the person identified as the beneficiary following the death of the veteran.

I introduced recently a bill, H.R. 2222, regarding this problem, and I am pleased that this provision to permit the VA to pay an alternate beneficiary, if the primary beneficiary cannot be located within 3 years of the death of the insured veteran, has been included in H.R. 2540. I know this provision will benefit the families of many, many, many veterans.

I also support the expanded definition which will allow Gulf War veterans to obtain service-connected compensation for chronic multisymptom illnesses such as chronic fatigue syndrome.

Like the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) before me, I am upset that the

provisions must be delayed until April 1, 2002. Once again, the reason for this is because this Congress enacted a tax plan first, before the budget. So we have to live within the context of a budget which was greatly restricted and restrained to us. So having spent this surplus, we are unable to promptly pay our debt to our Nation's Gulf War veterans. I find this deplorable, but we are under these congressional rules.

Of course, because this bill improves benefits for our veterans, I urge my colleagues to vote for H.R. 2540. I thank the chairman for another strong bill.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. MANZULLO).

Mr. MANZULLO. Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago a patriot from Freeport, Illinois, named Dan Steele went off to war in Iraq to fight for the American people and protect the freedoms this country has known for more than 200 years.

During the buildup in the Gulf, Dan's leg was fractured by an Iraqi soldier's apparent suicide attack. Over the next 8 years, Dan suffered from various conditions shared by many in the Gulf War.

In May of 1999, Dan succumbed to his illnesses and passed away. The county coroner listed "Gulf War Syndrome" as a secondary cause on his death certificate.

Shortly after Dan's funeral, I dispatched Al Pennimen, a retired judge on my staff, to contact his widow, Donna. She vowed to Dan to do whatever she could to help other Gulf War veterans suffering from mysterious ailments. Her story moved me to introduce legislation, H.R. 612, that now has the support of over 225 Members of Congress. A companion bill has been introduced in the Senate by Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHINSON. I am pleased to announce that significant portions of H.R. 612 are included in this benefits package today.

I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs for strengthening the part of the bill that provides enhanced benefits for ailing Gulf War veterans. These provisions will allow more sick veterans to qualify for compensation by expanding the list of eligible illnesses, adding strong report language on multiple chemical sensitivity, codifying 13 possible symptoms, and extending by 2 years the time period during which these symptoms may arise.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 2540. It goes a long way towards fulfilling the promises we have made to our veterans.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. SHOWS).

Mr. SHOWS. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs and to show my strong support for H.R. 2540, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2001. This important legislation will take meaningful

action to improve benefits our Nation's veterans have earned. As my colleagues know, we have been concerned about the appalling 75 percent rate at which Gulf War veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses have been denied compensation from the VA.

Earlier this year, I introduced H.R. 612, the Persian Gulf War Compensation Act of 2001 with two other outstanding advocates for veterans, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. MANZULLO) and the gentleman from California (Mr. GALLEGLY). This legislation garnered strong bipartisan support from over 225 Members of Congress. I am pleased to say that the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and my fellow subcommittee members helped us on some provisions in this bill that are key to provisions in H.R. 612.

The Veterans Benefit Act of 2001 will now clarify VA standards for compensation by recognizing fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, multiple chemical sensitivity, and other ailments, or poorly defined illnesses associated with Gulf War service.

Additionally, this bill extends the presumptive period for undiagnosed illnesses to December 31, 2003. This is a true victory for the veteran.

Mr. Speaker, these veterans put their lives on the line to protect, defend and advance ideals of democracy, and our American way of life by serving the United States military. They answered the call. We have a duty to answer them. Vote for this bill. It is the right thing to do.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER).

Mr. BAKER. Mr. Speaker, all too often we pick up the telephone and dial a 1-800 number or dial a business enterprise and we are, by computer, referenced from department to department to department, and often are not even able to communicate with another human being to get an answer to our very simple question.

Most of us see that simply as an aggravation, but when it happens to a veteran of military service when calling on his country to have a question answered, it is an insult. That is why I am grateful for the inclusion of a pilot program for 2 years which makes an effort to have a 1-800 veterans number. Amazingly, we will have a human being on the end of that phone. It is a long overdue service, and I think we should explore the potentials. It may be fraught with difficulty and difficult to perfect, but there is one thing that is for sure: The veterans who have given to this country are at least deserving of respectful treatment.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for taking this step towards what I think is an appropriate action for the veterans of our country.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).